

Institutional: Strategic Leadership

Sustainability Position



Summary: In September, 2002, the University of Connecticut (UConn) created the position of Director of Environmental Policy in order to focus on certain environmental issues and opportunities, particularly those associated with the University's \$2.3 billion state-funded capital improvement program. By designating this as a key management position, reporting directly to the University's Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, the University has provided this Director with the authority to pursue environmental excellence in the areas of regulatory compliance, green building and sustainability. This UConn position is unique within college and universities in its scope, which brings the Director into the cluster of key decision makers to influence campus planning, compliance and sustainability functions, and ensures accountability for the environmental implications of those decisions. This case study describes the creation of the position and initial actions associated with this appointment.

Campus Profile

University of Connecticut
Storrs, CT, 5 regional
campuses, health center and
law school campuses
FT Undergrads: 18,662
FT Graduate/Professional
Students: 7,180
Graduate programs: 17
FT Faculty*: 1165
FT Staff: 4,054
University Operating Budget:
\$1 billion for FY '03
Endowment: \$242 million
(2002)
of Buildings, Main Campus:
More than 350
Size of Main Campus: 3850
acres, including farmland &
open space.

Project Goals & Objectives

1. Foster environmentally sustainable development on-campus
2. Mitigate the environmental impacts of construction activities
3. Assure environmental compliance
4. Distinguish the University's reputation by promoting environmental leadership initiatives.

Description of Issue/Problem

During 2001-2002, a convergence of events and environmental issues ultimately convinced UConn to create an environmental officer position with responsibility for multiple program areas.

- The unprecedented growth of the campus, including more than 70 major construction and renovation projects completed since 1995 (and dozens more in progress or scheduled to begin over the next 10 years), brought with it a heightened environmental sensitivity among local and state constituents. The University recognized the importance of addressing those issues in the planning process and the need to instill a stronger environmental ethic in its capital improvement program.



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- Since the mid-1990s, UConn has invested more than \$11 million in the investigation and ongoing remediation of its former landfill and chemical pits located on the northern edge of its main campus. The further prevention of contamination leaching from the site remained a high priority environmental concern for the University.
- As part of a requirement for an expanded stormwater detention basin, UConn ordered its contractors to clear a section of wooded area previously planned as a natural buffer to the neighbors. Lack of communication about this change, along with subsequent erosion, sedimentation and permitting issues associated with the expanded detention basin, increased tensions between the neighbors and the university.
- In opting to participate in EPA Region I's Audit & Compliance Initiative, the University realized that an environmental officer was needed to work with its EH&S director in overseeing the audit program.
- Students, faculty, legislators and other stakeholders across the state, who had come to expect excellence and leadership from the state's flagship university, urged the Administration to create an environmental officer position.

Pre-Project Considerations

In formulating the position/department, UConn asked a number of questions that are relevant to any college/university contemplating the creation of a similar environmental or sustainability officer.

1. At what level of the organization should this position be placed? Is this a "coordinator" person, a staff manager or a senior staff appointment?
2. Should this position be primarily an operational or a policy function?
3. Will the position be externally focused (e.g., public affairs, policy) or internally focused (e.g., environmental impacts, compliance) or both?
4. To whom should this position report?
5. Will this person be hired to act as a change agent: to ensure environmental accountability in siting, planning, construction and operational decisions; to work with faculty and administration to improve existing programs; or all of the above? What experience and skill set should be emphasized (sustainability, land use planning, management, legal, technical, public affairs, facilitation)?
6. What level of staff support will be needed or feasible?
7. What authority will be granted to this position?
8. How will this position be held accountable and performance measured?

Steps Taken

Development of the Program

1. In September 2002, the UConn appointed a Director of Environmental Policy (Director), a senior level staff position reporting directly to the then Chancellor. The University permanently hired an experienced environmental manager. At the time, UConn anticipated inherent conflicts that could arise if the environmental officer reported to an operational vice president in a line management position. They decided instead to make this a senior staff position focused on policy issues, with its own department and budget. The Director's budget includes funds for an administrative assistant and an environmental policy student internship program.

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2. The Director's first steps were to manage the University's response to various CT DEP enforcement actions and concerns about the capital improvement program by exerting direct authority over construction-related environmental permits and the Environmental Impact Evaluations (EIEs) required for larger building projects. These initial actions demonstrated the credibility and authority of this newly created position.
3. He also led a consensus-building process with key stakeholders, including state legislators and town residents, to revise UConn's Master Plan for the conservation and development of its 886-acre Agricultural Campus. At the same time, the department conducted a comparative site study to examine alternative locations for the University's hazardous waste storage facility, and he chaired an advisory task force comprised of both UConn employees and external stakeholders to help with this study.
4. The Director's next steps were to form an Environmental Policy Advisory Council (EPAC). The University's President and Chancellor appointed this 25-member senior advisory group, which the Director chairs. This was a critical step, according to Miller, because the Council would become the vehicle to engage UConn students, faculty, administrators and staff in a dialogue about environmental stewardship, sustainability and leadership and to drive environmental stewardship across the university.
5. In order to develop and implement the first University-wide sustainability initiatives, the Council drafted an environmental policy statement and formed three subcommittees comprised mostly of ad hoc members of the University community: (1) Land Use & Sustainable Development; (2) Compliance & Best Practices; and (3) Environmental Outreach. (see the benefits section for further information regarding their accomplishments).

Participants

The Director of Environmental Policy chairs the 25-member Environmental Policy Advisory Council, which represents a broad cross-section of the University, as shown in the table below.

Constituency	Description
Students and Alumni	Alumni, undergraduate and graduate student representatives
Academic Administrators & Faculty	A Dean, two department heads, and the Vice Provost for Research & Graduate School Education
At-Large Faculty	Four professors, including two environmental program chairs and a law school faculty member
President's Office	Director of University Relations, Special Assistant to the President, Chief Operating Officer and an Assistant Director of Athletics
Senior Administrative Staff	Vice President of Business & Administration, Directors of Facilities, EH&S, Architectural & Engineering Services, Student Affairs and Purchasing
At-Large Members	Director of Public Safety, Energy Manager, Associate Vice Provost of a regional campus, Associate Athletic Director, and Director of the affiliate Center for Land Use Education & Research

The EPAC is coordinated by the Director, who spends $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of his time coordinating the activities of the EPAC and its subcommittees, with substantial support from the administrative coordinator and student intern(s).

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The three multi-disciplined subcommittees are comprised mostly of non-EPAC members to ensure the consideration of a broad range of perspectives in the development of environmental sustainability initiatives. These subcommittee members are too numerous to list.

Performance and Benefits

Environmental/sustainability leadership within the cluster of key administrative decision-makers has led to success and progress on multiple fronts.

- State officials approved continued bond funding for the long-term capital improvement program (21st Century UConn).
- After extensive public input, UConn's revised Master Plan for both conservation and development of the Agricultural Campus has been accepted by stakeholders as a viable alternative to restrictive legislation that would have adversely affected building plans.
- The EPAC has drafted and the President approved an Environmental Policy Statement for the University (see www.ecohusky.uconn.edu).
- UConn hosted a sustainability conference in 2003 for Connecticut colleges and universities.
- Working with UConn's construction management department, the Director has been authorized as the University's lead for any EIE and signatory for all construction-related environmental permit applications. As a prerequisite to his review, a new sign-off process assures the Director that all appropriate staff have approved permit applications and plans.
- Faculty, staff and students have actively participated in the meetings of the three EPAC subcommittees, engaging nearly 100 additional stakeholders from across the University community in the action planning process for UConn's environmental sustainability initiatives.
- The EPAC subcommittees have identified first-year sustainability initiatives and proposed specific goals and action plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve water, reduce waste paper, increase recycling, and improve environmental awareness and literacy.
- The Director has established an Environmental Policy internship program for students working with his office up to 20 hours per week, and has collaborated with faculty to engage additional students in related research projects.



Sustainable Design Guidelines (SDG)

UConn engaged its Master Plan consultants to draft the SDGs. The EPAC Land Use and Sustainable Development Subcommittee advised the consultants, and the Environmental Policy, Architectural and Engineering Services and Construction Management departments reviewed and edited drafts. The results of the project are beginning to be seen, such as the first rain garden at a public university in CT, as seen in the picture on the left, for managing stormwater in lieu of a conventional system. The guidelines will apply to all future UConn construction projects.

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Lessons Learned

A few of lessons learned include the following:

1. A senior level staff position reflects the University's commitment and sends a strong message to the campus community that environmental sustainability and compliance are core values of the institution.
2. A broad, multi-disciplinary organizational framework, such as UConn's environmental council, is necessary to achieve buy-in, develop consensus and communicate with the broader community.
3. Student interns provide essential research and technical support services, particularly in the absence of full-time staff. Their enthusiasm and initiative are equally valuable for sustaining momentum.
4. Similarly, it is important to identify and engage environmental "change agents" and "champions" among faculty and staff. Teamwork, and shared expertise and knowledge about how the university works are vital to the success of campus "greening" initiatives.
5. The campus setting, with its decentralized and diverse academic and staff departments, calls for a more flexible, consensus building and project approach to environmental management. This compares with private industry where a more centralized, hierarchical structure favors systemic approaches and management directives.
6. Expect organizational change. For example, since the Director's appointment, the University administration has been reorganized to separate the operational functions from the academic functions. UConn has hired a Vice President and Chief Operating Officer to handle the non-academic functions. The Chancellor's position has been shifted to one with academic authority, with the title of Provost. Consequently, the Director of Environmental Policy now reports to the VP & COO on the operational side of the organizational chart, instead of the Provost.
7. Progress and change often occur slowly, not just because of the size and complexity of the university, but also the need to build environmental awareness, discuss issues, reach consensus and implement programs that may be perceived as above and beyond core functions (i.e., education and research).

For Further Information

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Other Programs and Resources

We have listed some leading sustainability programs and initiatives at state universities.

Sustainable University of Florida www.sustainable.ufl.edu	University of North Carolina http://sustainability.unc.edu
Ball State University Council on the Environment www.bsui.edu/provost/ceres/cote/	University of Oregon Environmental Issues Committee www.uoregon.edu/~eic
University of Maryland Campus Ecology Project www.agnr.umd.edu/UMCPEcology	Green Destiny Council for Ecological Responsibility at Penn State www.bio.psu.edu/greendestiny
Michigan State University Committee for a Sustainable Campus www.ecofoot.msu.edu	University of South Carolina Environmental Advisory Committee www.sc.edu/EAC/
The Sustainable University of Michigan Initiative www.umich.edu/~sustain/index.html	University of Tennessee, Knoxville – Committee on the Campus Environment www.cce.utk.edu/
University of Minnesota Sustainability Campus Initiative – www.cnr.umn.edu/sci/	University of Texas at Austin www.Utenvironment.org
University of New Hampshire Office of Sustainability Programs www.sustainableunh.unh.edu	University of Vermont Environmental Council http://esf.uvm.edu/envcncl
Rutgers University - www.rusustainable.org/	University of Wisconsin-Madison Campus Ecology Program www.fpm.wisc.edu/campusecology
SUNY – Buffalo UB Green http://wings.buffalo.edu/ubgreen	North Carolina State University www.ncsu.edu/environmental_sustainability/

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